

**Note:** *The March notes were prepared by Ray Day, Jr., due to the absence of staff liaison de Michele.*

**Present:** Laila Barr; Dan Chavre; Ray Day, Jr.; Kathy Dunn (provisional)\*; Dave Elliott, chair; Kumiko Huff (provisional)\*; Jane Kuechle (provisional)\*; Miranda Leidich; Joan Michaels; Ed Miller; Carla Saulter, vice-chair; Bria Schlottman (provisional)\*; Tina Shereen; Roger Thordarson

**Staff:** Betty Gulledge-Bennett, Supervisor of DOT Community Relations and Communications (substituting for Barbara de Michele, who was ill); Carri Brezonick, Metro Customer Information Office Supervisor

**Guest:** Jon Morgan, member of City of Seattle's Pedestrian Advisory Board

Saulter opened the meeting at 6:05 p.m and asked members and guests to introduce themselves. Gulledge-Bennett then announced that two topics on the agenda would be held over to a future time, as they were not ready to be presented to the full body for discussion. These topics were: Going into Depth - TAC Outreach and Relationship Building, and 2009 Work Plan.

#### **Metro's Customer Information Office**

Carri Brezonick, METRO Customer Information Office Supervisor, presented an overview of her office and its activities during the end of the year snow storms. Brezonick stated that she joined METRO in August 2008 and has a team of 30-employees who work 24 hours, seven days a week. She stated that the calls and emails that her team receives range from advice and concerns to issues and services. In addition to the public, sometimes the sources are elected officials of METRO, General Manager Kevin Desmond or King County Transportation Director Harold Taniguchi. She said all of the information received and responded to and followed up on is kept in a database "forever"

As a new manager, Brezonick announced that one of her first goals has been to reply to people who call to complain or who ask for a return call. She said there are now five team members who are assigned this task, and that it just started. On an average day CIO receives 70-80 emails and up to 300-phone "comment" calls.

Saulter asked how all of this information is tagged. Brezonick stated that there are close to one hundred different categories that vary from requests for larger or smaller buses to more heat or suspected problems with the bus' shock absorbers. She noted that they even receive requests and comments from tourists and visitors from other countries.

Miller asked how this information is reported out and if it was available to the public?

Brezonick said that requests for data from the public could be obtained by completing a

\*Note: Provisional members have been appointed by the Executive, and their nominations are supported by their individual Councilmembers, but they have not yet been confirmed by the whole Council.



Request for Public Information form. Some of the data involves how long the public has to wait on a telephone line before a "real" person from Customer Information answers. Brezonick said the goal is to not have anyone wait more than two and a half minutes at the most. She added that some of the other data that they store relates to operator behaviors and trends that might be linked to a specific operator or route. Also noted were monthly reports on types of information and hits on the general METRO website and TripPlanner website.

Speaking from personal experience, Chavre wanted to know if METRO has a bus filled to standing room only, for two years, and nothing has been done about it, what should he do to get some action taken? C. Brezonick first offered her business card and told Chavre to call or email her directly and she would get this concern to the Operations Unit. She promised to get back to him with an update. As a rule of thumb, all concerns are routed to the proper division within METRO for responses. Her Customer Information team follows up with that division and issues a response to the caller letting them know the disposition of their concern.

Day Jr. asked if there was any coordination between Customer Information and METRO's Control Center for bus operators, especially when operators experience a problem such as possible rerouting because of an accident or street demonstration? Brezonick replied by saying that the system is not connected and it is something that has to be addressed. Usually, Customer Information Supervisors or their tech staff members receive calls from the Control Center and this information is passed on to Customer Information staffers, who are on the phones, and it is also posted for future shift changes to see.

Michaels inquired about complaints about recent fare increases. C. Brezonick stated that less than twenty-five calls had been received by her team since the last fare increase a month ago. Michaels also asked about public outreach and education, and how it was done by Customer Information team. Brezonick stated that they have the capacity to do it, but they could do a better job. She added the one of the new ways they are communicating with the public is through "blogs" and "twitters".

Saulter asked about responses to the blogging and twittering and whether or not it has helped. Brezonick said that since these new activities just started the previous Friday, it was too early to determine their effectiveness.

TAC members also touched on a number of other topics such as bus shelter lighting, ORCA Smart cards and tracking comments from the public and operators. Schlottman stated that there are many workers at her hospital facility who are very nervous about the upcoming implementation of the ORCA Smart card, adding that they had received very little information on how the system was going to work or be used by companies with large numbers of employees who use the bus for commuting to and from work. Both Brezonick and Gullledge-Bennett said they were aware of this and that

more information would be coming out via a "soft, systematic" rollout of the ORCA Smart card program. Shereen asked if Customer Information also logged comments from operators. Brezonick remarked that comments by bus operators go into a separate data base and this information is passed on to the operator's base supervisor and also entered into their personnel record. The same happens if a rider complains about an operator. The database used by Customer Information for public comments is separate, but can be programmed to search for specific information about an operator or a route or a category.

Saulter recognized a comment from guest Jon Morgan, a member of City of Seattle's Pedestrian Advisory Board. Morgan commented that having lived in a few major cities on the east coast, he was "...very dissatisfied with the lack of return comments and misinformation..." provided to him by Customer Information staff, during the four snow storms at the end of last year. Chavre added that he has had complained to the Customer Information team as far back as two years and still has not received a response. Brezonick replied that one of their difficulties for responding to questions regarding bus service is that they do not have "real time" information. She hopes that by the year 2011, when a new GPS locator system is installed on all buses, this problem will go away.

***[Note: At this point, TAC Chair Dave Elliott arrived and assumed the role of chair]***

Other TAC members made a variety of comments and suggestions. Thordarson suggested that perhaps METRO could partner with the Clear Channels company and have real time information displayed on reader boards inside the buses. Elliott commented that it is hard for METRO or any organization to staff for something like snow storms that only occur once every ten years. Day Jr. suggested that some attention be given to posting Snow Routes on METRO websites before the snow falls and make adjustments accordingly during a snow event, if necessary. Gulledge-Bennett pointed out that better coordination needs to occur between the cities and METRO. She pointed out that many jurisdictions felt that getting bus routes cleared and usable was a METRO problem and not a problem for the cities. Gulledge-Bennett gave the example of the City of Seattle plowing Third Avenue downtown but plowed the excess snow into all of the bus lanes, so buses could not make proper loading and unloading of riders.

Dunn asked Brezonick about the prognosis for more money coming in to help improve customer information activities. Brezonick stated that historically grant money had come in to improve databases, but that it is just too soon to tell if any grant money will be coming in from the federal government to help out. Elliott gave a brief overview of President Obama's Stimulus Plan and his perception on whether or not there would be money for transit included within that Plan. Leidich asked about the top types of customer complaints received by the Customer Information team. Brezonick reported that at the top would be complaints about operator misconduct and then fare disputes.



Brezonick added that complaints about the website Trip Planner were not many, but that complaints about the website in general had increased. Schlottman asked about METRO's relationship with the Washington State Ferry system regarding customer information on how to get from and to the ferries from bus stops. Gullledge-Bennett said she was heading up a group within METRO involved with this and other issues surrounding the creation of a ferry district. The group thanked Brezonick for her time and presentation.

### **Community Relations and Communications**

An overview of METRO's Communications and Community Relations Division was presented by Supervisor Betty Gullledge-Bennett.

Gullledge-Bennett started by providing a chronological history of the Community Relations Division from its inception more than 15 years ago. This was prior to the time when METRO was merged into King County government. It started out as the division for Community Outreach, and under her direction grew into Community Relations. Today, this division not only supports METRO and its transit community outreach activities in King County, but also supports road services, the fleet division, the King County Airport (Boeing Field) and the marine division. Gullledge-Bennett noted that in addition to providing a liaison to the Transit Advisory Committee via Barb de Michele, a liaison is also provided to the Accessible Services Advisory Committee. Other activities include: supporting advisory sub-committees to the Roads Division and volunteer Sounding Boards such as those for Link Light Rail. Not to be overlooked are the new social networking activities of blogging and twittering, in addition to producing informational videos, offering community open houses and conducting surveys and questionnaires on such topics as proposed bus route changes.

Schlottman: Wondered how METRO knows there are more people out there who don't have computers to access METRO website information? Gullledge-Bennett noted that regular contacts made by her seasoned staff with the public and public oriented agencies such as the League of Women Voters helps the Community Relations team assess the need for various means of communication with the public. She added that her division still gets hand written letters from the public. Gullledge-Bennett characterized the community outreach activities of her team by stating, "We're being a voice for the community and their representative to the King County Council." Shereen: Asked about percentage of federal transportation funds going to transit outreach versus road improvements. Gullledge-Bennett stated that there is no rhyme or reason as to which group gets more funds versus another, but that transit tends to get more.

Saulter: Expressed support for upgrading web activities, such as "twitter" and "blogging".

### **Committee Business**

Report on hosting the Washington Transit Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) conference by Schlottman, Kuechle and Day Jr: TAC is hosting this year's annual statewide meeting on Friday September 25, 2009, in Seattle. The team reported discussions thus far had centered round getting local sponsors for such items as reusable mugs; possible partial travel reimbursements and a trip on the new light rail system. A meeting room location was still being explored.

Day Jr. reported that the Southeast Sounding Board was ready to make its official recommendations to METRO management and that this would occur later this week. He added that he had respectfully declined the group's nomination of him to be one of their spokespersons before the King County Council in April. Day stated that he would make comments as a citizen at that formal meeting where all LINK Light Rail Connection Sounding Boards will be making their formal recommendations.

Miller reported that he was on the writing sub-committee for the Southwest Sounding Board and they would be presenting their recommendations to METRO management this Thursday. Miller said there continues to be a lot of unresolved discussions regarding fare equity between Sound Transit's light rail fares and METRO, in addition to transfers to other transit systems.

Barr stated that she did not attend the last meeting of the Ballard-Uptown RapidRide Advisory Panel.

Attendance at the Regional Transportation Committee's (RTC) monthly meeting was requested. This meeting will be held at 3 p.m. on March 18th. Kathy Dunn volunteered.

The floor was opened for the election of a Vice Chair to cover the months of July, August and September 2009. Chavre nominated Thordarson. A second was voiced by at least two other members. A vote was ordered by Chair Elliot and taken. The vote was unanimous to elect Roger Thordarson as T.A.C. Vice Chair for the next three months. He will serve as chair of the group in July, August and September.

The meeting was adjourned by Chair Elliot at 7:53p.m.